RMIT green brain makes you think

By KATE LAHEY
City Reporter

THE symbolism wasn’t entirely deliberate but with the failure of the Copenhagen talks, it is strangely pertinent. This is RMIT’s new addition, a “green brain” watching over Melbourne.

Due to open early next year, the extra (head) space is part of the university’s $600 million capital works program and was designed by Ashton Raggett McDougall architects, the firm behind the award-winning redesign of neighbouring Storey Hall in 1995.

RMIT vice-chancellor Margaret Gardner said she hoped Melburnians would find the brain intriguing, and thought the city was ready for it.

“What could be more apt at this time than that we embrace the symbolism of having a green brain?” Professor Gardner said.

The brain links Storey Hall to the old Singer Building on the corner of La Trobe and Swanston streets. “It extends all the conference facilities and seminar rooms in Storey Hall,” Professor Gardner said.

The canopy design is based on Storey Hall’s geometric Penrose tiles, two geometric shapes, 54 and 72-degree rhombuses, covering an infinite surface in non-periodic patterns.

Adjunct professor of architecture at RMIT, Howard Raggett, said he wanted to create “a kind of primordial Penrose” with his roof-top brain. The fibreglass surfaces will have a painted finish.

The refurbishment and brain pavilion cost $7.5 million.

On the other side of Swanston Street, RMIT is building a $62 million design hub, designed by Sean Godsell. It will have a facade of translucent, sandblasted glass cells, with the capacity for solar technology to be incorporated in them, which the university says will be a first.

RMIT failed to get federal stimulus funding for its planned Swanston Academic Building, which will wrap around the Oxford Scholar Hotel. But it plans to start work on it soon using its own and borrowed money.

Work on the 1927 Emily McPherson Building is due to be finished by the middle of next year.

Professor Gardner said the big capital works program, about 30 projects in total, would transform existing learning spaces and increase informal social areas, as well as add purpose-designed buildings. “There’s a level of respect and valuing of people in giving them good quality spaces, well designed,” she said.